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## **A BRIEF LOOK AT SOME BIBLICAL "FOURS"**

The first time the number **four** is referenced in the Bible is Genesis 1:19: On day **four** God made the sun, moon, and stars; the evening and the morning were the **fourth** day.

Because of the Sun, much of planet Earth experiences **four** seasons: Spring, Summer, Fall, and Winter.

The Moon has **four** phases: New Moon, Quarter Moon, Full Moon, and Third-quarter Moon.

This year, 2019, marks 50 years since Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin landed on the Moon. Having brought along elements that had been prayed over by his pastor, Aldrin, upon landing on the Moon, partook of Communion. Interestingly, his family name, on his mother's side, was Moon.

Our next reference to **four** is Genesis 2:11-14. The **four** rivers of Eden were: Pishon, Gihon, Hiddekel (Tigris), and the Euphrates.

Soon in Genesis we read about Eve, the mother of all living. Along with Adam, her name is very well-known, yet it only appears **four** times in Scripture (Gen. 3:20; 4:1; 2 Cor. 11:3; 1 Tim. 2:13).

There are **four** letters in the Divine name: YHWH. This is known as The Tetragrammaton, from a Greek word meaning "four letters." It appears over 6,000 times in the Hebrew Old Testament. Added letters in English have produced Jehovah or Yahweh.

**Four** lepers, dying because of famine in the land, asked: "Why sit we here until we die?" (2 Kings 7:3-8). Nearby was the Syrian camp with food in abundance. Knowing they might be killed, there was a chance the Syrians would give them something to eat. So in the twilight they rose up and made their march of faith. Let me insert something right here:

**If we try to do something and fail, it is better than if we try to do nothing and succeed.**

As the lepers approached the enemy camp, the Lord caused the Syrians to hear the loud noise of horses and chariots. They immediately fled, leaving behind food, clothing, silver, and gold.

Thus the **four** lepers did the *possible*—and God did the *impossible*—blessing them with food and supplies in abundance!

The writer of Proverbs 30, apparently intrigued with the number **four**, wrote about **four** things that never say "enough": the grave, the barren womb, ground needing water, and a burning fire (Proverbs 30:15,16).

He spoke of **four** things he did not understand: the way of an eagle in the air, a serpent on a rock, a ship in the midst of the sea, and the way of a man with a maid (Proverbs 30:18,19).

There were **four** perturbing things: a servant who reigns, a fool filled with food, a hateful married woman, and a maidservant who succeeds her mistress (Proverbs 30:21-23).

**Four** wise little things: ants, rock badgers, locusts, and a spider who skillfully grasps with its hands and is in kings' palaces! (Proverbs 30:24-28).

And, **four** majestic things: a lion, a greyhound, a male goat, and a king whose troops are with him (Proverbs 30:29-31).

In Ezekiel's "wheel in the middle of a wheel" vision (Ezek. 1), some suppose he saw flying saucers! As I have read this passage many times over the years, I have never taken this to mean flying saucers! Described as a symbolic vision about the glory of God, it does feature some interesting "fours." Ezekiel saw **four** living creatures, each had **four** wings, **four** sides, and **four** faces—that of a man, lion, ox, and eagle.

In a somewhat parallel passage, we read of the **four** living creatures at the throne of God in Revelation 4:7.

In Daniel, Chapters 2 and 7, **four** World Empires are described—Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome.

When three young men, friends of Daniel, refused to worship the golden image set up by the king of Babylon, they were thrown into the burning fiery furnace. But when the king watched, knowing three had been bound and cast into the fire, he said, "Lo, I see **four** men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the **fourth** is like the Son of God!" (Dan. 3:25).

A song recorded years ago by the Statler Brothers worded it this way:

*Did we not cast three men bound  
into the midst of that fire?  
But lo, I see **four** men unhurt,  
unbound, and walkin' down there.  
There's Shadrack, Meshack and Abed-Nego  
in the fiery coals they trod.  
And the form of the **fourth** man that I see  
is like the Son of God!  
They wouldn't bend.  
They wouldn't bow.  
They wouldn't burn!*

Years ago I heard about a survey that was conducted among college students. One of the questions was: "Who wrote the Bible?" The three most prominent answers were: "Matthew," "Mark," and "Martin Luther"!

What are called the **four** Gospels are, of course: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

In this article the number "four" has provided a teaching outline. But it is not our purpose to make more of it than what the scriptures say. Consider this: The parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10:30-37) illustrates whom God considers one's neighbor. Without doing violence to the story, one could make applications like: people who follow the downward path are "wounded" by sin; "oil and wine" could symbolize the work of the Holy Spirit; the "inn" could represent the church where spiritual health is restored, etc.

But when some suppose there are hidden meanings—like the **four** legs on the Good Samaritan's donkey represent the **four** gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John)—it seems to me they have gone too far!

While we are here looking at the word "**four**," it comes to mind there are two other English words that are pronounced the same, but with different spellings and meanings. "Fore" (simply a shortened form of "before") is used of God's "*foreknowledge*" (Acts 2:23; Rom. 8:29). And, there is the *very* common word "for." John 3:16 comes to mind: "*For* God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son..."

When Jesus, God's Son, spoke to the woman at the well about the water of life, it was still **four** months until harvest (John 4:35). Accordingly, this conversation took place in what we call December or January—the actual harvest being **four** months away in April. But, *spiritually*, the fields were *already* white unto harvest!

Jesus likened the preaching of the gospel to seed. (1) Some falls by the wayside, (2) some falls on rock, (3) some falls among thorns, (4) and some on good ground—thus **four** categories of people who hear the word of God (Luke 8:11-15).

When Jesus spoke about the destruction that would befall Jerusalem and the Temple—there were **four** disciples present: Peter, James, John, and Andrew (Mk. 13:3).

The Roman soldiers who carried out the crucifixion of Jesus were **four** in number. "Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took his garments, and made **four** parts, to every soldier a part" (John 19:23).

Some early church fathers thought of the **four** points of the cross as a picture of the gospel message going in all **four** directions—east, west, north, and south. Verses about the **four** winds and **four** corners of the earth (Ezek. 37:9; Isa. 11:12), probably refer to the **four** directions.

All **four** directions are mentioned by name in 1 Chronicles 9:24: "In **four** quarters were the porters, toward the east, west, north, and south."

Some suppose the word "news" is based on North, East, West, and South—that people watching the News on television learn about what is happening in all directions. But the word "news" probably means, simply, that which is *new*.

Writing to Timothy, Paul used **four** occupations as spiritual examples—soldier, athlete, farmer, and a workman who does not need to be ashamed (2 Tim. 2:3-15).

When John saw a vision of the Lamb's bride, the holy Jerusalem, it was described as being **four**square (Rev. 21:16). Years ago, two Christian relatives of mine (both now deceased) were talking. One attended a United Brethren Church, the other a Foursquare Church. "In Heaven," the one said, "We will all be *United Brethren*." The other replied, "Yes, but we will live in a *Foursquare* city!"

Though Jesus grew up in Nazareth, after his ministry began, *Capernaum* became his home and base of operation (Matt. 4:13). It was at Capernaum ("Town of Nahum") that **four** men brought a paralytic to Jesus for healing (Mark 2:1-12).

But when they arrived at the building where Jesus was preaching, the crowd was so great there was no way to get in. They could have folded their hands and said, "God knows our hearts. He knows we have done more for this man than anyone else. I guess it was not God's will. Perhaps later." But *faith* makes a way when there seems to be no way! *Faith dares* when reason would compromise and surrender.

These **four** men came up with a reckless solution—to go up on the roof, tear an opening, and lower the man to Jesus. Then one of them probably said, "We will need some *rope*—**four** long pieces." Now men don't carry rope in their pockets. Where did they get the rope? Maybe from a fishing boat in the Capernaum harbor or a nearby barn?

People inside may have heard the suspicious tramp of feet on the roof—and now someone was tearing it off! Dust and debris were falling—obviously. Then they saw a bed descending down from above. Some probably thought Jesus would surely rebuke these men. But Jesus, "seeing their faith," told the paralytic his sins were forgiven, to take up his bed and walk! Then everyone said, "We never saw *anything* like this!"

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